The Latter Glory

On Shouts and Weeping at the Laying of a Foundation

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The Meter for the Soul

We have been given marching orders this morning. There is a systematic attack going on to undermine what is holy, what is just, and what is good. When we begin to build up strongholds against those forces, there will be a turning of the tide where we have had weakness, where we have felt threat, where we have seen loss. God will come in and do something differently.

And here is the question I want to start with. We are not just bodies. As I noted on a recent Wednesday evening:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

Two actions by God produced who we are. God *formed*. God *breathed*. Out of the dust and out of the divine breath came this strange composite creature called a *living being*: a *living soul*, in the older translations. The soul is the space between the dust and the breath. And depending on what influences we open that space to, we either become open to the threats of this world (the systemic threats of the powerful enemies, the *Pink Floyd threats* of the mind) or we become open to the Spirit of God who comes to take his abode with us. The Spirit is the

Paraclete, the one who comes alongside, and we receive that help in our time of need (cf. Hebrews 4:16) only if we are willing to *depend* on it.

Now, the older I get, the more obvious it is that the *body* is not holding together the way it once did. I could run and play and lift and eat junk and stay up late and get up early at twenty-five, and feel great the whole way through. These days, if you are over forty-five and your feet hit the ground in the morning without pain, *bless God*. The rest of us walk a little stiff for the first few minutes: making the coffee, getting to the big chair, waiting for the joints to find their places again. The decomposition of the body is very easy to measure. I am wearing a watch and a ring right now that track every biorhythm I have: pace, stride length, heart rate, heart rate variability, temperature. There is a meter for everything physical.

But how many of us have a meter for the *soul*? Where is the device that measures *how are you doing, O soul*? The psalmist keeps asking: *Take courage, O my soul. Be strong, O soul. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?* (Psalm 42:5). We need something that indicates how it is going *up in here*, in the soul-space. And the answer the psalmist gives, and the answer Scripture gives consistently, is that the measure for the soul is *the action of the body*. The disposition of the soul is read off the body's behavior.

The Body Reads the Soul

Watch how universally this works. Do you have *joy*? Then you will do things that show rejoicing. The Scriptures speak of rejoicing with a loud voice, with a clapping of hands, with the lifting up of the hands in the dance. These are not arbitrary cultural conventions. These are the *natural manifestations* of internal joy showing up through the body.

Scientists have studied this in cultures that have had no contact with modern athletics (no football, no basketball) and have found that the *victory stance* is universal. When a basketball

player hits a contested three-pointer with one second left in the seventh game of the finals, *down by two*, does he say with quiet dignity, *Why, thank you. I have just won the championship*? Of course not. *The arms go up. The chest comes out. The head goes back.* Universal. Across every culture. No image of any Caesar in the history of art shows him entering Rome after victory with his laurel hanging dejectedly at his side. The victory stance is wired in. Sorrow is also wired in: the slumped shoulders, the lowered head, the bowed body of the defeated team walking off the field. The soul's condition manifests automatically in the body.

There are times for joy, and there are times for sorrow. Paul says:

"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

There is sorrow that leads to repentance and life and reconnection with the God of all spirits. That is the bright kind of sorrow, sorrow that animates the soul toward something more positive and productive. And there is sorrow that leads to self-loathing, anxiety, self-harm, even suicide. Those are inappropriate responses to sorrow.

And just as there is a sorrow-that-leads-to-life, there is also a *false joy* abroad in our culture: the manufactured euphoria of a Saturday night on the entertainment strip, where the apparent joy is actually a manic attempt to spike one's spirits because life has felt too dark. Be out of that scene before the false joy turns into something else. My fitness ring will sometimes report that my heart rate was high on a Friday or Saturday night and tell me *not to worry about it*, because that is normal for most ring-wearers on those nights. They are *jacked up on something*. Their heart rate spikes. Their sleep crashes. Their Sunday is wrecked. That is not the joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is a deeper register entirely, and it does not need to be inflated by anything from outside.

Call and Response

Let me show you something I love about the way God works. When we sang earlier in the service, *It is well with my soul*, we were participating, whether we knew it or not, in one of the oldest practices in worship. It is called *call and response*. The leader makes a statement; the people respond. You hear it in the African American spirituals that grew out of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the preacher would speak a word and the congregation would sing back. You hear it still in the AME tradition, where the preaching almost becomes a sing-song, with the preacher's line and the people's amen lifting each other into a single rolling rhythm. The reason call and response works is that *it does something to the soul of the people*. It binds the room together at a register below conscious thought.

This is not a new thing. Look at Psalm 136:

> Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! / For His mercy endures forever. / Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! / For His mercy endures forever. / Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! / For His mercy endures forever. (Psalm 136:1–3)

Every one of the twenty-six verses of Psalm 136 follows the same pattern. The priest calls. The congregation responds: *for His mercy endures forever.* For every verse. Twenty-six times. That is *hesed* in Hebrew: the steadfast loving-kindness of God, the covenant faithfulness that does not let go.

And the psalm is reflecting what God himself had declared at Sinai. After the golden calf, when God had every right to wipe out the people who had betrayed him within weeks of their deliverance, he passed before Moses on the mountain and declared his name:

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands" (Exodus 34:6–7).

That moment, when God revealed his loving-kindness to a people who had so quickly forgotten the covenant, became the bedrock of every later song of thanksgiving in Israel. The people could never forget it. The psalmist will not let *us* forget it. And Psalm 136 organizes the whole history of God's faithfulness around the refrain: *for His mercy endures forever*.

Look at how the psalm is structured. Verses 4 through 9 talk about *creation*: God making the heavens, laying out the earth, fixing the sun and the moon and the stars. And after each act of creation, the refrain returns: *for His mercy endures forever*. The creation itself is the foundational evidence of God's loving-kindness. When we walk outside at night and see the stars, when we hear the rain on our roof, when the sun rises over a quiet morning, *that is mercy*.

Then verses 10 through 22 move into the *Exodus* and the conquest. God struck Egypt with a strong hand. He divided the Red Sea. He brought Israel through. He overthrew Pharaoh. He struck down famous kings (Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan) and gave the land as an inheritance. *His mercy endures forever.* The psalmist is moving from creation, to deliverance, to settlement, and the refrain runs underneath every verse. I do not know what your present enslavement is. I do not know what kings are squatting on the land God has promised you. But God is saying: *my mercy endures forever for you. Remember that.*

Ezra: A Pitiful Foundation, a Loud Shout

Now let me take you to a moment when those very songs were being sung under harder circumstances. The promise of Psalm 136 (creation, deliverance, settlement) had been broken. Israel had landed in Babylonian captivity because the children of Israel had failed to maintain their part of the bargain. They had had the temple, the very same place Jesus would later call *the tower*, the very thing the priests in Jeremiah's day had chanted as if it were a magic word, *the temple, the temple, the temple*, and they had assumed it would protect them by its mere existence.

They were no different than the people at Babel building a tower up to heaven. They had said, in effect, *let us not be scattered; let us make a name for ourselves*. And God had let the temple burn to the ground and scattered them across the nations to learn languages they had never wanted to learn.

Then, after seventy years, a remnant returned. They were broken. The walls of Jerusalem were rubble. The temple was nothing but a memory. And in Ezra 3, they did something remarkable. They started worshiping *with what they had*. Before the foundation of the temple had even been laid, on the first day of the seventh month, they began offering burnt offerings. They did not wait for the building. They worshiped on the rubble.

And then, when the foundation *was* finally laid:

> When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. (Ezra 3:10–11)

Notice that. *They sang responsively.* Not later in the day, after some careful liturgical reflection. *Responsively,* quickly, immediately, the people sang back to the priests. The line came from the priest: *for He is good*. The line came back from the people: *for His mercy endures forever toward Israel*. Psalm 136 deployed on a pile of broken stones.

Be responsive, O souls, when you sing the songs of Zion. Be present. Be present with God when he is in this place. Some may say, *Rob, I have not felt the Lord in this place the way I once did, back in earlier seasons of this congregation's life.* I hear that. But God still wants *open*

vessels. He still wants responsive people. When the priests sing, when the priests speak, *something* is meant to come back from the people. And what comes back gathers the room into a single instrument that does what no individual could do alone.

I once heard a speaker at a conference in New York with about three thousand people in the room ask everyone to start clapping. For the first four or five seconds, it was total chaos: three thousand sets of hands clapping at different rates, a complete cacophony. But within ten seconds, *ten seconds*, every set of hands in the room was clapping in unison. The room had self-organized. Nothing had been said. No metronome had been provided. The clapping had *found each other*. That is what happens when people begin to lift their voices together. There is a unifying force that begins to operate in a community that is responsively singing. It is one of the deepest gifts God has given a worshiping people. We can either be like Babel and put our heads together to build a tower God has to squint to see, and then God says, *if these can do this, nothing they imagine will be restrained from them* (cf. Genesis 11:6), *or* we can put our voices together inspired by the Spirit, and watch the same synergy turn in the direction of God's purpose.

Shouts and Weeping

> But the very next verse of Ezra 3 introduces something we cannot pass over:
>
> But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. (Ezra 3:12–13)

Two sounds at the same moment. Shouting and weeping. Both *loud*. Both unrestrained. The young looking at a pitiful foundation and *celebrating* because at least *something* was being rebuilt. The old looking at the same foundation and *weeping* because they remembered the glory of Solomon's temple, and this small foundation could not possibly compare. The two sounds blended together so completely that the people *could not distinguish* the shout from the weeping. And the combined sound *was heard from a great distance*.

This passage has been on my mind. Because we are in exactly the same kind of moment in our own assembly, and I think in much of the church. Some among us look around and shout for joy at every small thing God is doing, *the foundation is being laid*. Others among us remember earlier seasons when the Spirit was poured out with what we would have to honestly call greater visible saturation, and we weep that it is not now what it was then. Both sounds, blended together, are *the sound of a congregation watching a foundation be laid*. The shouting and the weeping are not enemies. They are companions. Both are loud. Both are heard from afar off.

And I want to be honest about it. When earlier leaders of this congregation preached from this pulpit decades ago, there was a free-flowing of the Spirit you could feel in the atmosphere; people fell out under the presence of God. I will not pretend the Spirit is moving with the same *viscosity and saturating power* in our day. Let us not call black white and white black. The former glory *was* glorious. We should not kid ourselves about it. But neither should we let the weeping crowd out the shouting.

The True Foundation

Now look at when the foundation of the *true* temple was laid. Mark 11: the triumphal entry. Jesus comes to Jerusalem riding on a colt. The crowds spread their cloaks on the road and

cut leafy branches. And what do they cry? Not something new. Not something never heard before. They cry from *Psalm 118*:

"Hosanna! / 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' / Blessed is the kingdom of our father David / That comes in the name of the Lord! / Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9–10).

Psalm 118 is the same psalm Ezra 3 was drawing on (verse 1 of Psalm 118 is *Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever*, the same line the priests and people sang at the laying of the second temple's foundation). The crowds at the triumphal entry are unconsciously echoing the moment in Ezra when the foundation was laid. They are recognizing, without fully understanding what they are saying, that the true foundation of the temple is now being laid in their midst. Twelve lively stones gathered around the chief Cornerstone. Apostles and prophets as the foundation, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

And just as in Ezra, the same trifecta of people *wept* at the new foundation. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, exactly the same three categories who had wept in Ezra 3:12, *the priests, the Levites, and the heads of the fathers' houses*, refuse what Jesus is doing:

"And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching" (Mark 11:18).

They came back later and demanded to know:

"By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:28).

"That ain't how *we're* building this temple." Of course not. Jesus had just overturned the tables of the money changers, who had been taking money from impoverished worshipers and

making themselves wealthy in the process. (Go read Nehemiah 5 sometime to see how strongly Nehemiah, four centuries earlier, had confronted that same wealth-extraction. The pattern is consistent.) The temple Jesus was overturning had been built on the back of the poor; the temple he was laying the foundation for would be built on his own body.

So the same scene unfolds: shouts of joy from those who recognize what is happening, weeping and rejection from those who cannot see it. The blended sound is heard far off.

Haggai: The Latter Glory Shall Be Greater

Now look at Haggai, who is preaching at almost exactly the same time as Ezra is laying the foundation. The dates line up precisely. Haggai 2:

> Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?' (Haggai 2:2–3)

Haggai does not minimize the weeping. He names it. *The former glory was real. The present foundation is, by comparison, nothing.* That is honest. And then the word turns:

> "Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel," says the Lord; "and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land," says the Lord, "and work; for I am with you," says the Lord of hosts. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!" . . . "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:4–5, 9)

The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former. Read in its context, Haggai is talking about the second physical temple. But the writer of Hebrews quotes Haggai's *I will shake the heavens and the earth* line and applies it to the church (Hebrews 12:26–28). The latter glory greater than the former is not finally about a building. It is about the temple Jesus is building, the *people* in whom God dwells by the Spirit. *That* temple's glory is greater than Solomon's, and the work is being done in *us*.

Hebrews puts it like this:

> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. (Hebrews 12:22–24)

That is what you have come to. Not a building on a hill in Jerusalem. Not a foundation of physical stones. The latter glory is the assembly of saints made perfect through Christ, and you and I are stones in that house.

Zechariah: The Plumb Line in His Hand

Zechariah is preaching at the same time as Haggai and Ezra. Same week. Same place. Same circumstances. And Zechariah 4 gives us one of the most beautiful prophetic visions in the Hebrew Bible:

> Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." (Zechariah 4:1–3)

Two olive trees. Seven pipes leading from those trees down into a seven-branched lampstand. Continuous oil flowing from the trees, into the pipes, into the lamps, keeping the light burning. The way light was produced in the ancient world was *not* by flipping a switch. You took olives from a tree, pressed them, and put the oil in a lamp. Here the entire process is rendered visionary: *the oil is continuously flowing*. The light never goes out because the source never runs dry.

And who are the two olive trees? Later in the chapter, we learn they represent Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, *the king and the priest*. Their Spirit-inspired ministry is what flows down into the seven-branched lampstand to keep it lit.

Now extend that picture forward. The lampstand becomes, in Revelation 1, *the seven churches*. The Son of Man stands in the midst of the seven candlesticks, walking among the lamps, trimming and inspiring them (Revelation 1:12–13, 20; 2:1). And the two olive trees (the king and the priest, who in Zechariah were two men) become, in the New Testament, *one* person: Jesus Christ, who is both king *and* priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). The two trees collapse into one Christ, whose Spirit-pressed oil flows continuously into the church.

So spend your days being *inspired* by this one. Receive the inspiration God gives you in the press of your own week. And then come into the assembly and *share* what God has pressed out of you. There are brothers and sisters among us who are constantly returning to the Word, testing what they hear, riffing on it, pressing it down further. *That is olive oil flowing into the lamp.* Receive the inspiration of each other's pressed lives, and the candlestick burns brighter than any individual could keep it burning alone.

Not by Might, Not by Power

And then comes the famous word to Zerubbabel:

> So he answered and said to me: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”’” (Zechariah 4:6–7)

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit. The temple will not be built by political clout or military force or financial leverage. It will be built by the Spirit. And the great mountain (the great obstacle, the great enemy looming in front of the foundation-layer) will become a *plain*. Flat ground. The way will open. And the capstone, the final stone that completes the building, will be brought forth with shouts of *Grace, grace*.

Then the promise:

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you” (Zechariah 4:9).

The hands that laid it will also finish it. The one who began the work is the one who completes it. Paul writes the same promise in Philippians:

“. . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

The hands of Jesus Christ laid the foundation. The same hands will finish it. He is the Rock the builders rejected, who has become the chief cornerstone (Psalm 118:22; Mark 12:10). And Paul warns us how to build on that foundation:

> For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be

revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (1 Corinthians 3:11–13)

Be careful *what* you build with. The weak and beggarly elements of the culture of this world (wood, hay, stubble) burn away when the fire comes. But the fire that comes against gold only *purifies* it. Fire against silver makes it more pure. Stones do not burn at all. Fire only purifies the righteous elements. *Be careful how you build on this foundation.*

The Day of Small Things

And here is the word for those of us standing in front of a foundation that, *in comparison with the former glory, is as nothing*:

"For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).

Who has despised the day of small things? The shouts of joy at Ezra's foundation were responding to that very question. The foundation was small. The shouts were big. *Do not despise the day of small things.*

And then Zechariah closes the vision with a final image:

"For they shall rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:10b).

The seven eyes of the Lord (the watchers, the angels of God who range throughout the whole earth) *rejoice* to see the plumb line in the hand of the king. The watchers in Daniel 4 are the same eyes; an edict comes from heaven, and the watchers execute it: *the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will* (Daniel 4:17). It is God who establishes the order of the world, and the watchers are how that order is sustained.

So here is the question: *has the plumb line for the kingdom of God ever been removed from the hand of the Messiah?* No. It is still in his hand. And the seven eyes are still scanning to

and fro. The watchers are still awake. And if you will continually bring yourself to the God of heaven, bring the vulnerabilities, bring the threats Ezra and Nehemiah and Haggai and Zechariah all named, bring the *fox who could jump through the wall* (Nehemiah 4:3), bring the discouragement of the people whose hearts are trying to fail, *do not be discouraged*. Do not despise the day of small things. Legions of angels are present. The watchers are awake. The plumb line has not left the Messiah's hand.

Wake Up

The angel in Zechariah 4 had to *wake* the prophet *as a man wakened out of his sleep* (Zechariah 4:1). The visions of God come to people who have been roused from slumber. We can be roused too. We can come out of our sleep today. We can be lifted up and raised and realize the joy that is ours in Jesus Christ.

The foundation has been laid. For two thousand years, stone upon stone has been established. *You* are a stone in the building of God. We are being shaped in the rock-quarry of this earth: sometimes painfully, sometimes slowly, but always intentionally. *God is doing it.* Let him work.

If your body is living out what is actually going on in your soul, and you find you are discouraged about what you see, *repent*. Get right with God. Take hold of the grace he has given you. The glory that is yours in Jesus Christ is not contingent on whether the foundation in front of you looks pitiful in comparison with what former generations saw. Paul wrote in Romans 7 about the strange division he felt in himself, *I find a law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me; with my mind I acknowledge the goodness of God, but the body acts otherwise*, and then he opens Romans 8 with the answer:

> There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit . . . For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:1, 13)

Walk after the Spirit. Put to death the deeds of the body that betray the Spirit. *Live.* The hands that laid the foundation will finish the work. The capstone is coming, and it will be brought forth with shouts of *Grace, grace*.